when she left home the first time and goes on to describe the second time she was forced to flee to Pakistan:

> We left everything that we owned and came to Pakistan in the midst of a snowfall. With a broken heart we came towards Pakistan, leaving everything behind. All we had were just a few blankets.
>
> The first time wasn't that difficult since I came alone. But this was the second time and I had my children with me. There was no end to fighting so we came to Pakistan. We couldn't bring our belongings with us since there was no time to do that. All I had was a blanket and a basket that I carried in my hands.
>
> It was a very difficult time. Some of us came here and others stayed back. All the assets that we had were left in Kabul. We just saved our skins and came here. When we came here, we received a tent at Nasir Bagh. Then houses were built for us. We lead a poor life here. (Surraya, SDPI archive on women, conflict and security 2001)

The story of another refugee woman, Farida (SDPI archive on women, conflict and security 2001), reproduces the same theme in a slightly different manner. Here she emphasizes her helplessness and the complete absence of home as they had to live in a tent:

> In Pakistan we ended up in Nasir Bagh refugee camp, at the time my son had pneumonia. I didn't know where to go, but God bless a Pakistani policeman who gave me a reference, due to which my child received medical attention. During our early days we were living in tents. Living in tents was very hard because it provided little protection from the harsh storms and summer heat. It took us a long time to get used to living in a tent. It was very hard for my children to live in a tent during the scorching heat of the summer. Due to such hard conditions we were forced to rent a house, but our neighbors kept bothering us because my husband had worked in the communist regime.

Farida also outlines the multiple problems connected with the location of a house. She was a second wave refugee who had fled Kabul after the *Mujahideen* took over; as such, first wave refugees who had fled the Russians and pro-communist regimes perceived her and her family as the enemy who were responsible for their plight. Thus the renting of a house did not ease her problems. Instead, her countrymen and women made her

doubly uncomfortable in a second country due to her husbands' job with the government.

The locale of home thus is not devoid of the larger politics of the country of origin. Since refugees either live in camps or they tend to settle in similar neighborhoods they tend to reproduce the politics of their homeland in the host country. Sometimes families get enmeshed in this politics—a politics that can easily take a violent or threatening turn. The presence of friends and relatives in close proximity to the location of home is thus important for psychological security. Even on home ground, often people have contacts and relatives or friends upon whom they rely in times of crisis. As aliens without any reliable structures for protection, they rely much more heavily upon their informal networks of friends and relatives:

> We had a good life in Afghanistan when there was still peace. We had property and everything. Most importantly, we had relatives. Now we have no one. I lost my son..."(SM, SDPI archive on women, conflict and security 2001).

This demonstrates the sense of well being and security associated with home, property, country and peace. For this respondent, the presence of relatives and her son are as important as the presence of property for a good life. Thus home is not only a structure but is associated with a sense of security that is nourished through the existence of loved ones, who will take care of one in times of need. Equally importantly, there is a sense of happiness connected with one's relatives as they are also a source of love and shared experiences of sadness and laughter. These are important relationships that provide a sense of identity and grounding due to shared values and shared lifestyles as well as experiences. For women more than men, these sets of relationships that they have nurtured throughout their lives are an important resource and investment. Given their restricted mobility and limited knowledge of the outside world, their dependence upon these relationships is pivotal to their security.

While many women's experience of life was restricted to the home, this did not mean that the home was a prison. Even as they are physically restricted to the "refuge of the father" (Minh-ha, 1994: 15) they are able to transcend the confines of home through writing, imagination and storytelling. Home is thus a place from where the imagination can take off without fear—from where one can undertake several journeys that are

inexhaustible in their scope and width. This is how many women are able to express their ideas and concerns and communicate with the outside world. For many women writing and creativity are possible only when there is a secure and settled life ensured through the existence of a stable unthreatened home. The forced retreat from home affects women's creativity. As one respondent explained,

> I was always interested in writing poetry, even when I used to live in Khanabad. When I came to Kabul I started writing for magazines and newspapers of both Pushto and Dari. I even won a literary prize for my writings...I was very interested in writing but due to the outbreak of war, things started to change. There was danger most of the time, as a result I worked occasionally but I kept writing and had contact with the papers. I saw the bad effects of war; people were recruited by force into the army, and girls faced problems going outside. (Wajia, SDPI archive on women, conflict and security 2001).

The disruption of peace through violent conflict affected women's creativity in other ways as well. In a bid to save their lives and their loved ones, they were preoccupied entirely with escaping into safety. Under such circumstances, as one respondent poignantly said, "I was in such a hurry that I cannot remember the way I came through here from Afghanistan. I was anxious. How could I remember the poetic collection? I was not sure of survival here." (Nausherwan, SDPI archive on women, conflict and security 2001).

Given the fact that war creates fundamental anxieties about existence and survival, it embodies insecurity in the form of the rupture with home. Leaving home becomes symbolic of the larger insecurity where one is unable to guard against the outside and therefore is forced to abandon the most sacred of places—the home.

This is so because this space for refuge—the home—is protected in patriarchal societies by the figure of the father. This is why the physical leaving of home implies entrance into uncertainty as one crosses into unprotected terrain. This is why it is often assumed to be acceptable if women are harassed outside their home as the underlying logic is that they should not have left the refuge of the father. In other words, they are assumed to have "asked for it" (Minh-ha, 1994:15). In much the same way, the loss of country is also synonymous with the loss of home and in

the case of refugee women, both occur simultaneously. The deep psychological insecurity therefore, exists at multiple levels. As they leave their home, they leave behind various familial relationships; as they leave their country, they leave behind the larger familial metaphor represented by nation, culture, history and identity. As they enter a new country, the sense of exposing themselves to the danger of the unknown, to harassment in a male domain for which they were neither prepared nor trained, takes on frightening proportions. The patriarch who protects, the interchangeable father and the state, is absent and unable to protect. Displacement is thus not a simple fact of changing one's place and country of residence. It has deep-seated psychological repercussions.

The deep psychological sense of security associated with home is not only turned on its head, the home, which provides nourishment becomes the very place that leads to death. It becomes a metaphor for the grave. Furthermore, the constantly changing forms of the "enemy" (ranging from the Russians and USSR supported governments to the *Mujahideen*, the *Taliban*, the Northern alliance, and now the Americans) make it hard to single out one identifiable phenomenon and associate it with insecurity. In the case of Afghanistan, there are multiple enemies and one does not know which one is worse or which one will strike. A Freudian analysis might lead one to assert that this coming together of the grave and place of security is symbolic of harkening back to the mother's womb, which is both a space for security as well as a watery grave. Of course, such a notion of home is not applicable across cultures but in the present context, it might make an interesting interpretation that may be well worth exploring further. One may begin by asking if home, in the context of violence, pushes a person back to a helpless fetal state in which danger may come from any direction, including the mother's body itself. Thus the inability to identify a clear enemy on the one hand, and the possibility of the government/state/patriarch being the enemy on the other, result in deep trauma.[10] The following quote, where the respondent could not tell whose rockets and bombs were killing them, makes this very clear:

> Missiles came and landed. What was it! It was a kind of war. Our home was down the mound. On one side was Tina Pass mound and on the other side we had the Bala Hisar, and on another side the Special Guard...we were surrounded from all four sides.

10 Similar comparisons of the home with the grave occur in several interviews, e.g., a later description also highlights the same feeling of being caught in a space from where escape becomes impossible in the face of unpredictable and long periods of rocket attacks.

Bombs from all sides landed on our area. Many people died in our area. In every home, if there were four persons, all four died; if there were five, five died; if there were six, six died; if there was one, that one died. People lost their assets as well as lives.

Day and night the planes kept coming and conducted bombardment, which destroyed our homes. Nothing was left. Wealth and property was destroyed. We were left with nothing, not even enough to cross over to Pakistan. There were also children. On one occasion, the bullets would come from the Mujahideen while on the other from the government's soldiers. There was heavy war..." (Roshan SR SDPI archive on women, conflict and security 2001)

The inability to identify one single enemy makes the experience of displacement harder. When everyone becomes the enemy, "othering" for peace becomes increasingly difficult so that practical/implementable options are hard to visualize. Under such conditions, women are unable to provide or envision strategies for peace and reconstruction. Thus, the possibility of an indigenous feminist or women-centered formula for peace remains non-existent or latent.

Indeed, the Afghans whose hopes of achieving their objectives for peace have been destroyed due to having fled from their country twice and sometimes thrice, demonstrate why their visions of peace are singularly unimaginative. It would be very hard to go through the devastating experience of violence twice and thrice and still stay optimistic about the future. The following is a moving account and I include it here not because it is a solitary voice but because it is representative of many other similar voices. This particular narrative is about the double trauma of going back to Afghanistan only to find out that conditions did not change with a change in government and hence the respondents' decision to come back.

We went. When the Islamic government took over, our whole family went back. Our home was in Kabul. We had been punished enough. We had seen many hardships during our refugee life and gone through helplessness and loneliness. We thought perhaps we would find peace in our homeland. But when we went, rockets were launched on the very first day. Our father had told us that there would be peace but there was fighting everywhere. Not for a single day did we have happiness. We spent the whole night in fear as rockets were being launched

> constantly. These were Engineer Sahib's rockets. At that time they were known as Engineer Sahib's rockets.[11]
> ...One day rockets were launched constantly and towards the late afternoon my cousin came and told my mother that my uncle had been martyred...All our family has been destroyed in this revolution...we were all frightened. My father was left with small children and we were so grief stricken that we didn't know what to do. When they left my brother and we (three sisters) remained in the house. Toward the afternoon our houses and our whole colony was taken under siege. When we inquired we were told that war between Shoravi (pro-Russian government) and the Hizb-Islami had broken out. This is what our neighbors said. We were surprised and confused about the war. What if it never ended? If they broke into our house what would we do? We used to buy bread from the market and that day there was not a single piece in the house. We didn't know what to do especially with the small children. We were having feelings of regret. We wished that we had gone back and had not stayed here. We stayed hungry in the house with the children for two days and two nights. Rockets were constantly launched. No one could go out nor could anyone come in from outside. We had no hope for life. We always thought that any time a rocket would fall and hit our heads. After two days the siege was over. They went away after satisfying themselves. Many people died or were injured. We told our father that it was better to be without a homeland than to be living in such a homeland. So we came back to Pakistan. (Rahila, SDPI archive on women, conflict and security 2001)

The sense of being trapped and the wish to leave home and homeland makes Rahila equate the security of home with "un-homeness" so that by rejecting the physical edifice of home and territory of a country, one can achieve security. Rahila (ibid) goes on to describe the final event that convinced her father to return once again as a refugee:

> I told my father that we wanted to go back to Pakistan but he did not agree. He said that the war would be over one day. When he did not agree with us, we prepared ourselves to combat the rockets and stay...when I was coming back [from my uncle's house] towards my house, which was located on a roadside, a rocket fell and hit a bus and then a taxi. Both burst into flames...I have a habit that I always wear white clothes. When I looked at my clothes they had shreds of human flesh on them. It looked like raindrops.

11 The reference is to the then *Mujahideen* Prime Minister, Engineer Gulbadin Hikmatyar. Thus the implication is that ironically enough, the government itself was attacking and destroying the Afghan people.

> ...I could not tolerate it anymore and I ran towards my house when another rocket came and hit our house. I was injured again. I was very seriously injured because when I regained consciousness I was in a hospital in Peshawar, Pakistan.

Rahila's experience of displacement is not an ordinary one if we compare it to non-refugee populations. However, for the Afghan refugees, such stories have managed to acquire "normalcy" due to their repeated occurrence. Connected with the double trauma of going back and returning to the country of refuge is also the constant shifting and wandering of the refugees within the host country. Shifting from camps to homes and from there to other cities in search of safety and livelihoods is an inhospitable experience as the host population looks upon the refugees as anathema.

> We migrated from Afghanistan for the first time 15 years ago because the Russians bombed our home. My uncles were mujahideen and had their own front. Therefore, it was difficult for us to live there. So we migrated to Pakistan and lived in a camp. My family moved to Quetta to live there...for the second time when the Najib government collapsed, we went to our country. We went there with the hope that our country would be free, women would be free and that we would live in peace. None of our dreams came true. When we went there, the situation was worse for women. There was war, rockets and rocket firing. It was the game of jihadis.[12] They fought for the seat of power. They did not care whether people lived or died.
>
> ...After one or one and a half year, we came back, because conditions for education were not suitable. There was no school. Schools were closed. There was a war going on. Girls were abducted, it happened in broad daylight. We came back. (SJ, SDPI archive on women, conflict and security 2001)

While there were those who shifted back and forth in the hope of settling back in their country eventually, there are others whose villages were completely destroyed and who are unable to relate to a country to go back to. These are the people who are extremely poor and have no home and nowhere to go. After the destruction of their village and their way of life they live life as if they are outside the state. The sense of belonging is absent and there is no grand narrative, either of the state or of peace, to relate to.

12 The word *jihadis*, meaning those who wage *jihad* (holy war) is being used here interchangeably with *mujahideen*.

> But that [Afghanistan] is also not our country (watan).. We are not only refugees here [in Pakistan] but also there [in Afghanistan]. We have no village (watan) anywhere. Today we are here and tomorrow there. Now the landlord has asked us to vacate this place but we don't have money to shift. (Fareeda, SDPI archive on women, conflict and security 2001).

Although the Afghan refugee women are unable to "make sense" and narrativize[13] their collective experience at present, this does not preclude a common theme of a golden past that they would like to recreate. They usually begin with emphasizing how good life was in Afghanistan. In fact, all respondents underscore this view. It comes repeatedly, irrespective of whether they were rich or poor. This is often done in great details: descriptions of meals—breakfasts, entertainment when guests arrived—images of plenty. Very few talk of other aspects of well being. This past associates home with happiness, with plenty and is basically dependent upon a dreamlike memory of the homeland. To the question how was life in Afghanistan, the following is a fairly representative sample:

> Life was good there. Nights were good. One's own country is always beautiful. Have you not heard the Pashto couplet that nobody leaves his/her country (watan) with their own consent but either because they become poor or out of grief for his/her beloved. Our country and houses have to be built again [emphasis mine]. At the moment our houses are destroyed and this is the life we face day in and day out. (Roshan, SDPI archive on women, conflict and security 2001)

The present inability to imagine a future is poetically explained as a mistake in having forgotten to ask God for peace:

> What we regret mostly is that we wish to God that our visit to Afghanistan had brought us happiness and we could see what our country was like...what did we see in our country? War and bloodshed! We only saw bloodshed and war in our homeland and we returned to Pakistan with these images in our minds.
>
> We had forgotten what happiness was. We prayed to God to give us our homeland but we did not ask for our peace and security there. Perhaps we had asked Him to give us our country but forgot to ask Him to grant peace along with it. This was a mistake

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13 I borrow the usage of this word from Katherine Pratt Ewing (2000: 251) who writes about the denial of a narrative and women's inability to narrativize Turkish Muslim womanhood.

that we made. (Rahila, SDPI archive on women, conflict and security 2001).

V. Conclusion

This paper addresses how women fare during times of conflict on the home-front. Why there are ruptures in the meaning of home as the result of war and tries to highlight the depth and extent to which the multiple meanings of home impact women.

While some studies indicate that in fact wife abuse increases in refugee situations, the focus of the present analysis is on the meanings of home. Among these meanings, home becomes a symbol of violence when it comes to a woman's relationship with a man and patriarchal authority. However, her own relationship with the house/home is different in that it represents a sanctuary—even if it is a patriarchal sanctuary. Home is the source of primary identity for women not only because both are associated predominantly with the private sphere but also because home is the locus of self, culture and belonging. This is true for men as well as women; however, due to the historical role that women play in the making of home, they identify much more with it.

Women's understanding and representations of home involve multiple themes that relate to both the physical as well as imagined and intangible aspects. Aside from being a reflection of self, social and economic status, home represents the space where women can be happy and secure, where they can be creative and where they enjoy familial support. At the same time, due to the extreme degree of violence and destruction that has been perpetrated due to the war, home and country are no longer the symbols of protection and security. Both mirror the peril they contain for the very people they need to shelter and protect. This peril has been experienced several times, leading to double and triple trauma as the Afghan refugees keep fleeing back from their country and their homes in the face of constant bombings and fighting. This process has also rendered some women completely homeless so that they are unable to conceptualize the presence of a place that may be called home.

The themes that emerge from the interviews are about the destruction resulting from war and deaths due to rocket attacks and the yearning to go back to the place that was home and that lies destroyed. Many talk about the double trauma of returning under the *mujahideen* only to find out that

the same destruction and senseless war continued and they were as insecure as they had been previously. There is thus a sense of betrayal that is not alleviated by the sense of alienation in Pakistan. Their house is not "home"—it is a place, a mud house, a rented house, a camp or a tent. It is not home. There are constant thoughts of returning home and this prevents them from coming to terms with the present. Their refusal to accept their move as final (something their hosts also do not want them to do) makes them feel that the present is "temporary" even though it has affected their lives very deeply and permanently.

We also conclude that displacement, whether within one's country or outside of it, has implications not only about physical security but also anxieties about non-material aspects that form the basis of our identities, of who we are. These issues involve shifting identities, ruptures in their meanings and our perceptions of ourselves and others' perceptions of us. These identities also have to do with being men and women. For many women memory is an important coping mechanism. Memory serves to preserve their class and social identities but also their national identities and association with their country as something beautiful. However, simultaneously the memory of violence prevents them from narravitizing their individual experience into collective history or collective consciousness.

I do not wish to end on a note of pessimism. As a social scientist, I would like to see new spaces being created by Afghan refugee women in the midst of the tremendous violence they face. I am confident that these spaces and a new politics will eventually be formed; however, for the time being, we need to recognize that having undergone multiple traumas at multiple levels, they require respite and a breathing space – a space and time for personal and collective healing to take place and for creativity to be able to take off. For us to expect towering narratives of courage, indigenous exotic wisdom and survival is to begin to impose a new colonizing idea and discourse upon them.

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Violence and Home: Afghan women's experience of displacement[1]

Saba Gul Khattak

Abstract

This paper, based upon qualitative interviews with Afghan refugee women in Pakistan, looks at the impact of violent conflict upon women's lives in the context of displacement. In this regard, it looks at women's understanding and representations of home as women's security is primarily tied to the security of home. It highlights the depth and extent to which the multiple meanings of home impact women as the destruction of home has implications that go beyond the physical --ranging from ideas of self, personal and national identity, creativity, the continuity of culture and a personal and collective history as well as future.

I. Introduction

This article depends upon a collection of 50 plus qualitative in-depth interviews with Afghan refugee women that were conducted over a period of 2 years between 2000 and 2001.[2] The purpose was to investigate the gendered effects of conflict upon women. The interviews were conducted in Pushto and Dari and these were later transcribed and translated. We changed the names of the respondents for reasons of their personal security. Quotations in this article are from the translated interviews.

The women we interviewed came from diverse backgrounds and experiences. A majority of them lived in and around Peshawar in camps as well as in different neighborhoods of the city. The interviews reveal multiple concerns and interpretations. Of course, these are class bound and connected to the number of years/time the respondent has spent in Pakistan i.e., the stage she is at with regard to migration and change of location. The distance or immediacy of the violence that women encountered as well as the intensity of their loss also colored the interviews.

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1 A much shorter version of this chapter has appeared under the title "Home as place and home as space: Afghan women's experience of displacement" in *Development* 45:1 (forthcoming).

2 These interviews with Afghan refugee women were conducted as part of an SDPI project entitled, "Women, conflict and security in Pakistan". They constitute the SDPI archive on women, conflict and security, 2001.

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There are several themes that emerge from the interviews we held with Afghan refugee women regarding violence, peace, displacement, loss, death and hope. Of these themes, I chose to concentrate upon their conception and representations of home as it captured several of the themes that we investigated and provided a lens with which to get a view of their myriad realities. Instead of allowing grand theory to categorize and guide, I made a conscious effort to let the women's voices speak and derive my analysis from their words rather than any preconceived ideas.

To facilitate further discussion, I have divided their ideas into two broad schemes pertaining to their conception of home as social and psychological space and home as a specific geographic location and structure. This is not to imply the binary division between mind and matter or the material and sublime; the conceptions of home in the present context merge into one another and are simultaneously present at multiple levels in the discourses of refugee women. As the different representations of home in women's discourse simultaneously contain ideas of identity, culture, creativity, happiness and sadness, the past and the future, security and insecurity, I have not attempted to segment them into neat categories. The ideas merge and emerge out of one another and it is best to let them stay that way.

The next section discusses why looking at the nexus between conflict, home and women in the context of international relations is important to explore. The third section provides a brief summary of the Afghan conflict as a background to understanding Afghan women's experiences of conflict and insecurity. The fourth section is entirely devoted to women's voices as they talk about home with reference to conflict. This is followed by the conclusion.

II. International Politics, Conflict, Women and Home

This article discusses the constant disruptions in the uniform meanings of home for Afghan refugee women due to the direct impact of war upon their lives. To do so, we look at the different ideas that are contained within and underlie the concept of home. In this regard, we take home to be more than the binary division of public and private though these concepts are at the root of the idea of home since it serves to include as well as exclude, more or less like a state or a nation.

The constitution of private and public space is fundamentally an ideological divide that keeps shifting in accordance with changes in economic and social realities. This divide is also a gendered divide as men are associated with the public spheres of politics and work and women associated with the private sphere of home and family. The state is identified with the public sphere but its incursions extend into the private sphere as it legislates for the protection of the latter and by so doing continues to erect boundaries and separation of the two spheres. However, there is a definitional shift when one looks at the state in the context of international relations. The state as an entity among a polity of nations identifies itself with the home/the private sphere when it comes to issues concerned with internal policies. This is why it is possible to talk about domestic policy. However, the connection between the home (in its actual form) and the state in the context of violent conflict remains unseen. While a declaration of war is seen as an attack upon the greater home (the state), the attack on actual homes in the context of armed conflict is not taken into consideration at all and does not even emerge as an issue of concern.

As discussed earlier, while some of the functions of the home are similar to the state, one seldom comes across any mention of home in the context of international politics. This is so because the home is not accorded any importance or attention in international relations theory. In fact, one may criticize international relations IR theory as being limited in that it does not look at home as a construct that is integral to state formation and its continuation. In IR theory, the basic unit of analysis is the nation-state; even extra state actors such as parastatals and international organizations also constitute its subject matter, but the micro construct of home upon which the edifice of social life in a state is built/constructed is not part of international relations theory.

One associates wars with battlefields and with men, whether they ride horses, tanks, jeeps or helicopters and planes. Wars are associated with wide-open spaces, public spaces, not with homes. Homes are associated with women and with the family hence they belong to the private sphere. International law regarding war and armed conflict reinforces such dichotomies by making a difference between combatants (soldiers) and non-combatants (civilians), going into great detail about the areas that can be attacked or bombed such as airfields, and areas that are outside the purview of war such as homes and communities. Many of these laws have been ineffective and widely challenged by women's groups and victims of

wars over the last decade, and before that by warring parties contesting the definition of combatant and non combatant due to the involvement of entire populations in war efforts. Women's rights groups and other like-minded groups question the public/private dichotomy and insist that sexual violence must be recognized as an instrument of war. Such groups have recently been successful in having rape declared as a war crime.

The recognition of rape as a war crime admits the fact that women constitute an integral part of war not only because women are women but also because their bodies and beings have representational and symbolic value. Although rape and other forms of corporeal punishment and humiliation leave deep scars and therefore are of immediate concern, the destruction of home and villages is also debilitating and is also used as an instrument of war to spread fear and intimidation. The tendency of marauding armies in the past to murder, loot and burn that which they could not carry with them, resulted in the destruction of entire villages and communities. While this has been widely documented, very few people have looked at the issues that emerge out of these acts of violence.

The destruction of home and community has implications that go beyond the physical being of these places. These range from ideas of self, of identity, creativity, interpersonal relations and ones' worldview. Some of these issues have been addressed and analyzed by anthropologists in the context of recent conflicts. However, these accounts are generally restricted to documenting and observing changes in human relations in the context of individual violence such as murder, rape, ritualistic violence etc. One seldom comes across accounts that make the connection between the violence of war and conflict in conjunction with the dislocation of people from their homes. This kind of violence is rarely discussed.[3]

In conjunction with the absence of home, the subject matter of IR theory and security studies is also devoid of the presence of women for the most part. This has been more than highlighted over the last two decades by feminist readings of international and security studies. Although a handful of women authors have brought women into the ambit of security studies,

3 There are some excellent accounts though; e.g., Carolyn Nordstrom (1997) *A different kind of war story*, Phladelphia: University of Pennsylvaia Press; Patricia Lawrence (2000) in Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Mamphela Rampheles and Pamela Reynolds (eds) *Violence and Subjectivity*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press; and Pamela Reynolds in Das et el (ibid).

their work continues to be regarded as marginal by mainstream analysts.[4] The paucity of writings by women and about women in IR texts leave intact gaps in our knowledge about the role of women in security i.e., how they interpret security and how they require it. These limitations make this article imperative to write as well as difficult to research since there is little to frame it in.

While there is little about the home in IR texts, feminist theory has addressed the issue of violence in the home effectively. Home is predominantly viewed as sacred because it is a fundamental unit of the private sphere and is therefore outside the purview of the public sphere. The women's movement, spearheaded by feminists in the 1960s and 1970s looked upon the home with suspicion as they exposed the myth of home as a nurturing sacred space and drew attention to the brutality and oppression women face when they question family values and challenge male authority.[5] The home, because it is the symbol of the private sphere, assured of privacy by the state due to the social contract, is guarded by patriarchal traditions as a space that cannot be questioned with the result that violence (predominantly perpetuated by men) can continue to go unquestioned so long as it does not result in murder. On some occasions even murder is condoned in the name of tradition or narrowly enforced morality. It was thus an important step forward to focus on the abusive aspect of the home—an aspect long accepted and seldom addressed to the advantage and protection of women.

Bringing domestic violence out of its centuries old closet is a critical contribution. In conjunction with other studies coming from the field, it appears that women continue to face violence in the home more intensely as they become refugees.[6] However, such a focus, crucial for understanding women's multiple oppressions, serves to take attention away from other equally important connections that revolve around the home in the context of violent conflict. In this regard, it is important to view the relationship from other angles also if we are to understand the complexity of women's experiences and the shaping of their relationship

4 See for instance, Cynthia Enloe (1983, 1990, 1993, 2000), Jean Elshtain (1987, 1990), J.Ann Tickner (1990), Rebecca Grant and Kathleen Newland (1991), V.Spike Peterson (1992, 1993), Betty A.Reardon (1993), Jennifer Turpin and Lois Ann Lorentzen (1996).

5 See Laura L. O'Toole and Jessica R. Schiffman, *Gender Violence* (1997) for a comprehensive history of the issue as well as other issues related to domestic violence in section 3 (pp 243-304).

6 I am grateful to Urvashi Butalia who pointed out that studies of women in Kashmir indicate that as the struggle for autonomy from India intensified, so did domestic violence. In Kashmir some studies also indicate that many women have also become immune to violence and become perpetrators in the home context as well as the public sphere.

with home by war and conflict, especially when homes are targeted. In this context, home as the site for domestic violence becomes one aspect among others of women's complex experiences. It is these other aspects, that are ignored by the dominant discourse and that are not 'authenticated' by feminist or IR theory, which forms the crux of this paper.

Given these broad parameters, and given the gaps, this paper presents a women-centered analysis of a situation that affects both women and men very deeply. The focus on women is particularly important as their voices are seldom included because of the assumption that these are represented by so-called neutral social science that extends to everyone.

III. Afghan women's experience of insecurity

There are several ways in which one can discuss the concept of home in the context of Afghan women refugees' lives. Firstly, one can discuss it in the context of the most recent exodus is that of Afghans (mostly women and children) fleeing American bombing of *Taliban*-held cities starting October 7, 2001. This was preceded by an exodus of Afghans uprooted by drought and near famine situations. As the actors at the political helm of affairs changed, so did the refugees and their experience. To go back to the beginning then, one can talk about the initial phase of the conflict between the former USSR army and what may be generically termed the Afghan resistance from 1979 to 1992. This affected the lives of rural women as the source of resistance came from the more conservative sections of the population rather than the educated elite of Kabul. The second phase of the conflict began when the *Mujahideen*[7] took over between 1992 and 1996. This phase affected urban professional classes and resulted in their dislocation. This was also the beginning of the "ethnic-ization" and "sectarian-ization" of the conflict. The third phase of the conflict, with the coming of the *Taliban* in 1996, affected all women, irrespective of class, sect or ethnicity.[8]

All of these changes have produced different types of refugees; additionally, there are many who repatriated and then returned to Pakistan

7 The *Mujahideen* (literally freedom fighters) were a coalition of seven Pakistan based Afghan political parties that took over from the Najibullah regime. The coalition of extremely conservative and middle of center religious parties could not last as there was internal dissent over who could exercise power.

8 The *Taliban* (literally students of religion), supported and trained by the Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, occupied more than 80 percent of the country until their fall in early 2002 and imposed a very conservative (mis)interpretation of Islam upon the country. Afghan women have been impacted in the most disastrous manner by these policies that restrict them to the home and deny them the right to earn a livelihood or acquire education.

as the violence and war did not subside. Although there have been different types of effects of conflict upon the homes and lives of these different categories of women and refugees in general, yet there are some narratives that are common to all women. Over the course of the conflict, as bombs and rockets fell upon houses, people were forced to flee their homes as villages and cities became sites of fighting and terror. According to Trinh T. Minh-ha (1994: 12), the story of refugees "exposes power politics in its most primitive form...the ruthlessness of major powers, the brutality of nation states, the avarice and prejudice of people." The story of Afghan refugees contains tales of terror unleashed by major powers, neighboring states as well as their own people. Their experience cannot be grouped under neat categories associated with exile, migration or refugeehood. Indeed, their experience can be analyzed in all these contexts and several others at several levels. Therefore, at one level it does not matter whether the bombs are manufactured in the USA or the former USSR. What matters to the people is what the bombs do to them when they are dropped. As one Afghan woman in Pakistan, a recent refugee from the bombing, explained, "*Jung sho—Kabul taa raalo*" (fighting erupted and it reached Kabul) or as another woman put it in an understated way, "the circumstances became unbearable" meaning the bombing was horrendous. For the women then, what mattered was that they had to flee their homes in order to be secure.

This was the case much more for women than men who have some sensitivity to whose bombs are raining although many have learnt to distance themselves from the warring factions. For many of the poor displaced women and their children, the removal of the Taliban and killing and looting carried out by the Northern Alliance is not tantamount to liberation, neither does the promise of democracy hold meaning. What they underscore is their need for peace (*qaraar – araami*). For example, one respondent, when asked if her son will wage/continue the *jihad* (holy war), promptly emphasized that he will only work to establish peace. This is a contrast to the mother of twenty years ago who was willing to sacrifice her son's life for the war. The following section explains why such a phenomenon is possible today. The main focus is on women's relationship with home in the context of violent conflict.

IV. Home and the Afghan refugee women experience

Afghan refugee women's pain and suffering indicate constant physical and psychological violence. This article concentrates upon their experience of

and relationship with home in the context of displacement. As discussed earlier on, we interpret home as a positive locus of identity for women rather than adhering to the feminist position considering home to be primarily the first site of oppression for women.[9] This is not to deny the validity of the feminist position but to limit the parameters for the present analyses in the context of displacement.

The major themes that appear in the interviews pertain to the different associations with the idea of home in its physical as well as symbolic contexts. The leaving of home is not only about acquiring security it is also symbolic of leaving behind a sense of identity, a culture, a personal and collective history. Indeed, the word home has several connotations for women, hence, its leaving, its abandonment and its making are important. Women find it hard to grapple with the sense of danger and threat they associate with home as a result of the 21-year conflict. Instead of being a safe haven, home and homeland also represent a place of peril in the interviews. Displacement from home and country evoke a deep sense of loss and resentment as well as despondence. Simultaneously, there are constant attempts and thoughts of going back. These are accompanied by various recollections and depictions of home representing peace and plenty -- an important coping mechanism as there is hope that this memory can one day in the future be revitalized. We thus find that there are several interpretations and representations of home –some of which are conflicting and paradoxical--that coexist in women's discourse of home and displacement.

Starting from the broader parameters of a conception of home, it is interesting to note that the word for country and home is used interchangeably – *watan.* When Afghan refugee women talk of going home, they talk about going back to their *watan.* (There are obvious connections with nation and nationalism to which we will return later in the article). Home is thus intricately woven into the idea of belonging, belonging to a place and a community. In this sense, a person derives her/his sense of self from home, hence the saying "to be at home." Refugees and migrants are never quite at home in the countries and places

9 I am grateful to Farzana Bari, Women's Studies Center, Quaid e Azam University, Islamabad, who pointed out that I was looking at the home in a very positive way, whereas, the home is not always a positive space in women's lives. While I acknowledge that even in the present context Afghan refugee women feel that the home has become a place of confinement and imprisonment for them, there are also other over-riding aspects of the issue that are generally neglected and therefore not a part of the dominant discourse. Also, because I have let women's voices guide me rather than imposing my own narrative upon them, I have tried to analyze the themes that surface in their interviews.

that they live in since the sense of belonging and home is missing. This is because home also represents a way of life, a way of being, a culture, and a way of thinking. Rushdie, writing about refugees and migrants in his novel *Shame,* expresses their angst: "We have come unstuck from more than land. We have floated upwards from history, from memory, from Time." (quoted in George, 1999: 173). Leaving home is thus not a simple act of changing one's place of residence. It denotes a parting of ways with a life that one is familiar and comfortable with. This is so because one derives ones identity from one's sense of home.

Rosemary Marangoly George (ibid, 19), giving an example of the equating of self and home relies upon the psychoanalytical theory of Jung to demonstrate these connections. Jung, she writes, "regarded an individual's home as the universal archetypal symbol of the self". According to Jung the different rooms in a house represent a person's different selves and states of consciousness. This identification with the house is deeply embedded in the human psyche. George explains that this identification is a two way process whereby the home not only represents how one perceives ones' self but also stands for how others may perceive a person. Therefore, home is crucial for the perception of identity and many women consider it to be an extension of their selves. This is why there is so much emphasis upon teaching girls about housekeeping; slowly they learn to derive their identity and self-worth from the manner in which they keep their house clean and in order. Therefore, when they are forced to leave home—the space that they took great pains to build into a reflection of themselves, they suddenly feel bereft of identity. The way one furnishes and decorates ones' home--the furniture, the crockery, the cutlery and other material objects have representational value as they reflect ones' social and economic status. They are signifiers of a woman's personal talents as well. The following quote from an Afghan refugee woman demonstrates this amply:

> ...Our family left their homes just like that and didn't even carry a single spoon or a cup. We still don't have anything proper as we came to Peshawar with only the clothes that we were wearing at that time. (Rahila, SDPI archive on women, conflict and security, 2001)

Surraya (SDPI archive on women, conflict and security, 2001) also stresses the paucity of material possessions that she could bring with her

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